

SECOND EDITION.

No. 17.

THE LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

TRADITION.

BY REV. FR. BRIDGETT, C.S.S.R.



PUBLISHING DEPOT
AT SAUNDHILL, CORN LANE, GLASGOW.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

.
Orders sent to the Diocesan Secretaries, or
direct to the Depot, 52 Sauchiehall Street,
Glasgow, will be promptly attended to.
.

TRADITION.

BY REV. FR. BRIDGETT, C.S.S.R.



PRICE ONE PENNY.

230.2
B 76 +
189-

TRADITION.

WHEN St. John had completed his supplemental Gospel, he wrote these words: 'There are also many other things which Jesus did, which, if they were written every one, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written' (John xxi. 25). The Rev. Mr. Beecher has made the following reflection on this saying of the Apostle: 'These words,' he says, 'affect me more profoundly than when I think of the destruction of the Alexandrian Library, or the perishing of Grecian art in Athens or Byzantium. . . . The leaving out of these things from the New Testament, though divinely wise, seems, to my yearning, not so much the unaccomplishment of noble things, as the destruction of great treasures, which had already had oral life, but failed of incarnation in literature.' This is certainly a most true and natural thought, and may to some extent be shared by all. But a Catholic knows that there are words of Jesus Christ, not written in the New Testament, yet not therefore lost; for they were incarnate in TRADITIONS which subsist to this day, and will subsist while the world lasts.

In the present pamphlet, then, we are to consider what Catholics mean by Tradition, and also whether it was intended by our Lord to be a means of transmitting to us the truths of Divine Revelation.

I.—WHAT IS TRADITION?

Various misconceptions exist even among educated men respecting the meaning of this word.

Particular stress, it will be noted, is laid upon 'Ritual' as one of the great channels of Tradition by reason of the special scope of the learned author.

The Catholic Truth Society of Scotland is deeply indebted to Fr. Bridgett, C.S.S.R., for giving it permission to extract this pamphlet on Tradition from his valuable work—*The Ritual of the New Testament*.

To take a modern instance, the author of a treatise on the Bible, called *Liber Librorum*, says that those who appeal to Tradition forget 'that everything to which man attaches importance he desires to have in writing; that all we know of history comes down to us in books; that books live when Tradition dies; and that letters remain unchanged when institutions have altogether lost their original character.'* He is mistaken. We do not forget such elementary truths. But he forgets that Tradition is not necessarily unwritten.

We do indeed maintain that oral teaching has many advantages over teaching by writing; but, again, books are of the greatest help to oral teaching, and may sometimes be necessary. When St. John wrote to Gaius, 'I had many things to write unto thee, but I would not by ink and pen write to thee, but I hope speedily to see thee, and we will speak mouth to mouth' (2d Epistle of St. John v. 13, 14), he recognised the superior facility of oral communication. When he wrote his Gospel, he by the very fact recognised the great utility of written records.

The question of Scripture and Tradition is not one merely of the respective advantages of written or oral teaching, for Tradition is not necessarily unwritten. 'Unwritten Tradition' is a technical phrase. It does not mean Tradition committed to memory, and which it is unlawful to put on paper; it means Tradition not written down *in the canonical books of Scripture* by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost,—Tradition intrusted by the Holy Ghost to the Church, to be transmitted in other ways, of which writing is of course one of the principal.

By Tradition Catholics mean either the handing down of truths and facts, or the truths and facts themselves which are handed down. And in this latter sense, by unwritten Traditions, are meant all those truths and facts, whether identical with what is recorded in Scripture or not, which are handed down from one generation to another by any means besides the inspired Scriptures themselves. By Apostolic Traditions

* *Liber Librorum*, p. 79.

we mean such as are derived from the teaching and actions of the Apostles, and are not of later and merely ecclesiastical origin. Among Apostolic Traditions, and among the channels of Apostolic Traditions, Ritual holds a very prominent place.

It will be best in the first place to state clearly the question at issue between Catholics and Protestants; when this has been done the proof of the Catholic position will be most easily understood.

2. There are, doubtless, many Protestants who write *as if*, before the Apostles separated on their respective missions, they had written out the New Testament in its present form, multiplied copies of it, as is done at the present day, and distributed everywhere these copies to their disciples.

The controversies of the day, however, with Rationalists, have forced the attention of the Protestant world to the formation of the canon of the New Testament. The truths on this subject, which till lately seemed known only to the learned, have at length become popular.

A recent writer on the Protestant side, who is so far from having either 'High Church' or Catholic tendencies, that while he speaks of Anglicans with scorn, he can scarcely bring himself to call the Catholic Church by any other name than 'the apostasy,' or 'the mystery of iniquity,' says on this subject: 'It was, without doubt, *long* before the written word occupied any position at all resembling that which it now holds. Nor is this surprising. For as the gospel had been at first proclaimed orally, a vivid tradition of this teaching would naturally take the place of any book or books in which it might be embodied. Indeed, for the first hundred and fifty years, the apostolic writings, although in separate circulation, do not seem to have been regarded in any sense as forming one authoritative book. The first catalogue of the books of Holy Scripture, drawn up by any public body in the Christian Church, which has come down to us, is that of the Council of Laodicea (A.D. 365). The application of the term Bible to the

collective volume of the sacred writings cannot be traced above the fourth century.*

There are those who assume as a first principle requiring no proof that the written Word was coextensive with oral teaching. This assumption we shall consider in another chapter. They also assume that, if they are coextensive, the written record will necessarily replace oral teaching. This may be so sometimes. If you were engaging a clerk, and had come to an agreement in conversation, and then the terms of the contract were put on paper and signed by the partners, no doubt the document would replace the verbal communication as more explicit, certain, and permanent. But a written instruction is not always a complete substitute for other methods. A watch-maker, watch in hand, directs his apprentice verbally how to construct the machinery. He then writes down every rule thus orally given, but at the same time leaves with the apprentice the model watch itself, to elucidate those instructions. May the apprentice, on the pretext that he has his master's writing, disregard and put aside the watch as now superfluous? Assuredly not. The watch would be a part of that apprentice's tradition. The written paper might we will suppose—be coextensive with the conversation and the watch; it might explain its every detail. Yet the watch would be coexistent with the paper, both its own witness and the paper's interpreter, as much as the paper would be its exponent. Let us put the Church and her institutions in the place of the watch, and we see the office of Tradition.

Even if there were explicit and detailed and undisputed authority in Scripture for every doctrine and practice of the Catholic Church, which is a thing we do not assert, yet, even if there were such, we should still make use of Tradition, still defend it as a divine appointment, still consider it as an authentic, authoritative, and divine witness to God's revelation. The Scriptures alone, however full or explicit they might be

* *Liber Librorum*, p. 79.

supposed to be, would require something more than themselves, not by way of explanation, but of result or fulfilment. If I found all the decrees of all œcumenical councils, in so many words, in the pages of the New Testament, I should still require something more. I should look not in Scripture, but outside Scripture, for the things of which it spoke—for the rites and the sacraments, and the priesthood and the hierarchy, just as I have to look for these things now, not in the shelves of my library, not in the writings of the fathers and doctors of the primitive or mediæval Church, but in the living Catholic Church.

But the continued existence of such things as I have mentioned constitutes a part of what we call Tradition. Things have a voice as well as books. Institutions not only exist but speak. They are witnesses. 'The heavens show forth the glory of God,' says the Psalmist, 'and the firmament declareth the work of His hands. . . . Their *sound* is gone forth into all the earth, and their *words* into the ends of the world' (Ps. xviii. 1, 4). God's creatures, then, are God's witnesses. God's supernatural works—the Christian Church with its constitution and its Ritual—have also a sound which is gone forth into all the earth. As the continued existence of the universe is God's tradition of the Creation, so is the continued existence of the Church the tradition of the Redemption.

Tradition, then, is neither confined to the memories and mouths of men, nor to the pages of books. It is also the voice of Ritual. Let me take as an illustration the one sacrament of Baptism. Its form of words teaches of the Blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The pouring of the water teaches of the stain of sin, original or actual, and indirectly of the first father of the human race, from whom original sin is derived, and, consequently, of the unity of the human race. It teaches also of the second Adam, the Redeemer, by whose authority this rite is administered; it teaches of grace and justification, and of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,

through which, and according to which, the death to sin and resurrection to grace are conferred. It teaches also of a visible Church, to which it is a visible entrance. Of all these things it speaks by its very nature. How much more clearly when the rites and ceremonies of ecclesiastical institution are added to it, the exorcisms and unctions, the profession of faith and the promises, the white robe and the lighted candle, and the rest ! So is it with regard to the other sacraments. To quote the words of Cardinal Manning * ‘The sacrament of Baptism incorporates, so to say, the doctrines of original sin and of regeneration ; the sacrament of Penance, the absolution of sin after Baptism, the cleansing of the precious blood, the power of contrition, the law of expiation ; the sacrament of Confirmation, the interior grace, and the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost ; the sacrament of Order, the divine authority, unity, and power of the hierarchy of the Church . the sacrament of Matrimony, the unity and indissolubility of Christian marriage, the root of the Christian world ; and so on. Each one embodies, teaches, and requires faith in a constellation of Christian truths ; and the seven sacraments of the Church are a record, or Scripture of God, anterior to the written Gospels of the Evangelists. Much more the divine worship of the universal Church, of which one of these seven sacraments is the centre, namely, the sacrifice and sacrament of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. The incarnation, redemption, and consubstantial union of the Mystical Body with its Head, the communion of saints and of souls departed, are therein incorporated and manifested. All truths congregate around the altar, as all truths radiate from Jesus Christ. The whole revelation of Christianity is reflected in it.’

* Temporal Mission of the Holy Ghost.

II.—HAS TRADITION DIVINE AUTHORITY?

Do the Scriptures of the New Testament, then, altogether condemn Tradition and class it among the lying inventions with which the spirit of darkness deludes his followers, as some men pretend? Or do they allow that it may serve a temporary purpose, and then yield place to themselves and become obsolete, as others maintain? Or do they suppose that it has a perpetual office, and is essential, by the will of God, to the transmission of Christianity, as Catholics teach? These are the questions now to be answered.

1. And first, does the New Testament entirely condemn Tradition? Among the many charges made by Dr. Robert Vaughan* against Ritualists (under which name he includes Catholics) is one which is often repeated by Protestants, and which I therefore notice. It is well known that our Blessed Lord severely denounced the Pharisees, because 'they made void the commandment of God that they might keep their own tradition' (Mark vii. 9), and He applied to them the words of the prophet, 'In vain do they worship Me, teaching doctrines and precepts of men' (v. 7). It is asserted then that Catholics and Pharisees are in this respect just alike. Dr. Vaughan even considers that Catholics were aimed at by Jesus Christ still more than His contemporaries. I will not deprive him, however, of whatever benefit his argument may derive from his own statement of it. I will give it in full.

'Our Lord knew,' he says, 'that the sin of the Pharisees had been a besetting sin of human nature in all past time; and He knew that it would remain a besetting sin of human nature through long centuries to come. He knew that the great sin of the world hitherto had been creature-worship. He knew that the next sin to that, and a sin naturally connected with it, had been a superstitious reliance upon ceremonies. He knew, moreover, that the course of multitudes to whom His Gospel

* Ritualism in the English Church by Dr. Robert Vaughan.

was to be sent would be, not to reject it, so much as to corrupt it, and to corrupt it after the Pharisaic manner. His lessons on this subject, accordingly, were designed, not so much for a few men then living, as for the generations of men to whom His words would pass to the end of time. He knew that the Christian Church would have her Elders as the Jewish Church had them ; that she would have her traditions as that Church had them ; and that she would have her Ritual superstitions bearing a strong resemblance to those then prevalent. On no other ground can we understand why the Gospels should have given us this everlasting Pharisee. We know that the Pharisee who comes up thus in the pages of the Gospel, comes up after the same manner in the pages of church history, presenting the same type, and filling about the same space.'

The answer to the objection is very easily found. Our Blessed Lord does not condemn the Pharisees for following Tradition, but for following *their* traditions, human traditions, false traditions, traditions contrary no less to the real and authentic tradition of the Jews than to the written law.

The religion of the Jews was at no time a mere book-revelation. Antecedent to and concurrent with the writings from time to time given to them by their legislator and their prophets, was the great national tradition—their polity and worship. At the time of our Lord, sects and heresies had been formed, like those of the Pharisees and Sadducees, some taking from, others adding to, the ancient and authentic tradition. What Jesus Christ blames in the Pharisees is, that they magnify their sectarian traditions, and by so doing undermine the moral law. What is there in this that bears the slightest resemblance to the conduct of Catholics ? We follow no sectarian traditions ; we call ourselves by no party names ; we admit no human precept in opposition to the law of God.

We admit Tradition, we attach great importance to Tradition ; therefore we are like the Pharisees ! Do Protestants then deny all traditions ? Is it maintained that Tradition is essen-

tially evil? But even Protestants admit, as we have seen, that the Christian faith was taught first traditionally, that several generations of Christians, and those the most heroic, had little besides Tradition to instruct and guide them. Is it possible that educated and earnest men should argue, from the condemnation of false and immoral traditions, that all traditions are false and immoral? Because the Pharisees prayed at the corners of the streets, is all prayer condemned? Because the Pharisees disfigured their faces when they fasted, is all fasting hypocritical? Because the Pharisees sounded a trumpet before them when they gave alms, are we never to relieve the poor? It would be as reasonable to maintain this as to say that, because the Pharisees followed false traditions, we are not to follow those that are true. Examine our traditions; prove them to be false, to be human, to be immoral, and then triumph over us and call us Pharisees; but do not use the childish argument of a mere play upon words, as if all traditions are bad because certain traditions were condemned by Jesus Christ.

But before we take leave of the argument against Tradition, which has given occasion to these reflections, it is but fair to see whether the words of our Blessed Lord have no application to Protestants. It is certain that Protestants, no less than Catholics, go by Tradition, though Protestant traditions are modern, local, changeable, not ancient and universal and immutable like those of Catholics. 'The truth is,' says Mr. Gladstone, 'that we are all of us *traditioners* in a degree much greater than we think. What we suppose to be from Scripture is really, as a general rule, from the Catechism, or the school-master, or the preacher, or the school of thought, in immediate contact with which we have been brought up.'* A Protestant may repudiate Tradition; may try to exercise his private judgment on Scripture, unfettered by the school or sect with which he has been associated; he may study Scripture without note or comment, yet even then he will not escape the influence of

* Remarks on *Ecce Homo*, by Mr. Gladstone.

Tradition. He cannot put from his mind his past thoughts and character ; and these have been in a great measure formed by the Tradition in the midst of which he has lived. It has been most truly said . ‘ Our real commentators are our strongest traits of character ; and we usually come out of the Bible with all those texts sticking to us which our idiosyncrasies attract.’*

We have a painful example of this in the very accusation against Catholics that I have copied from Dr. Vaughan. How came he to see the Catholic in the Pharisee ? How came he to see a condemnation of the Catholic mode of teaching in that of the Rabbinical traditions ? The explanation is, that he was himself under the influence of Tradition—of the Tradition of *his* Elders, of Calvin, Luther, Cranmer, Knox, and the rest. It was these elders who originated such preposterous interpretations.

Among the Jews the Rabbinical traditions were of a later origin than either Scripture or the real Mosaic and prophetic traditions ; so, too, among Protestants these traditions of their elders are not yet four hundred years old. And these new and false traditions render illusory the precepts and promises of God as contained in Holy Scripture. If there is no profanity in imitating the conduct of Dr. Vaughan and applying our Divine Master’s words to modern controversy, I would venture to address writers like those with whom I am engaged in this manner. ‘ Jesus Christ said, “ Preach the Gospel to every creature. . . . I am with you all days to the consummation of the world. . . . He that heareth you heareth Me, and he that despiseth you despiseth Me. . . . But the gates of hell shall not prevail against My Church.” But *you* say, “ The gates of hell did prevail for eight hundred years and more ; Jesus Christ is not with the Church but with the Bible ; he that reads the Bible may despise the living teachers.” Thus do you make void the word of God by your tradition that you have given forth.’

* Henry Ward Beecher.

2. Moreover, Tradition, so necessary at first, became even more necessary afterwards for the preservation of the Christian faith.

We are told that towards the beginning of the fourth century the Canon of the New Testament was at length completed and generally accepted, and that thereupon the old rule of faith, oral Tradition, became antiquated. It had been a transitory form of communicating the knowledge of the truth, and truth now took its only permanent form in the promulgated canon; and this became the sole rule of faith to later generations, as oral Tradition had been to the first. But history tells us that, almost immediately after the period appointed by this supposed providence of God for the substitution of the Book for the Church, the civilisation of Greece and Rome, in which the use of books was comparatively easy and general, was swept away by the incursions of barbarian hordes, and gave place to that state of ignorance and anarchy in which the individual possession and study of the Bible was a sheer impossibility to the immense majority of Christians.

3. But did Jesus Christ, did His Apostles, intend that the Gospel should be made known to men by means such as these? I ask not, was the doctrine I have just mentioned taught by Him? for the solution of that question depends upon a previous one. Before we can know what are the doctrines and the practices of His religion, we must know by what means He intended such knowledge to reach us. Protestants appeal to Scripture: what does Scripture say?

It says not one word to indicate that the Christian faith and life are ever to be derived from a book independently of Tradition. Though Jesus Christ intended to confer upon His Church the inestimable treasure of the Gospels, Epistles, &c., of the New Testament, no such intention is expressed among His recorded sayings. If He gave personally any precept to any of His Apostles to write, it could only be among the 'many things' which the Gospels do not state. What they *do* state

is, that He chose Tradition as the means of making known His precepts to the world; "Go, *teach* all nations" (Matt. xxviii. 19).

That the Apostles of Jesus Christ intended their writings to be used in the Christian Church is evident from the mere fact of their writing; and of the value and importance of their writings there never could be a question among those who believe in their divine commission. And St. Paul imposes on the Thessalonians the precept: 'I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren' (1 Thes. v. 27), and again on the Colossians, 'When this epistle shall have been read with you, cause that it be read also in the Church of the Laodiceans, and that you read also that which is of the Laodiceans' (Col. iv. 16). The importance, then, of Scripture, as superadded to oral Tradition, is self-evident, and has been defined by the Council of Trent; but in vain would you seek in the pages of the New Testament for proof or hint that any Apostle contemplated a time when Scripture should supplant Tradition, and when, by the promulgation and acceptance of Scripture, Tradition should lose its authentic character and authoritative force. St. Paul tells the Thessalonians to 'stand fast, and hold the traditions which they have received, whether by word or by epistle' (2 Thess. ii. 14). A modern writer on the Canon admits that 'there is nothing to indicate that the Apostles regarded their written remains as likely to preserve a perfect exhibition of the sum of Christian truth,' and even affirms that they were 'perhaps unconscious of the position they were destined to occupy.' He seeks to account for this on the ground that 'the mission of the Apostles was essentially one of preaching, not of writing; of founding a present Church, not of legislating for a future one.'^{*} But the Apostles did legislate for the future, and were perfectly conscious both of God's provisions and the Church's duties. Let us hear St. Paul: 'O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding the profane novelties of words . . . Hold the form

^{*} Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, art. 'Canon.'

of sound words which thou hast heard of me in faith, and in the love which is in Christ Jesus. Keep the good thing committed to thy trust *by the Holy Ghost*, . . . and the things which thou hast heard of me by many witnesses, the same commend to faithful men, who shall be fit to teach others also. . . . Evil men and seducers shall grow worse and worse, erring and driving into error; but continue thou in those things which thou hast learned, and which have been committed to thee, knowing of whom thou hast learned them. . . . All Scripture inspired by God is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice, that the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work. I charge thee before God and Jesus Christ, who shall judge the living and the dead, by His coming and His kingdom, preach the Word,' &c. (1 Tim. vi. 20; 2 Tim. i. 13, 14, ii. 2, iii. 14, iv. 1).

Here is an Apostle of Jesus Christ making express provision for the transmission of the faith and discipline of his Master, now that he himself is near his death. He looks forward to the future, even to the distant future, the latter days; he foresees errors, profane novelties, evil men, and seducers. What means does he provide for the safe custody of the religion he has planted with so much labour? What precautions does he take against the dangers that threaten it? Does he say that Tradition is an unsafe guardian, that it has nearly done its work, that it must soon yield to Scripture? Does he tell Timothy to multiply copies of the epistles he has received, and of all other portions of Apostolic writings which he can collect, and to spread them among the people? Does he speak of the printing-press or of Bible Societies? No. He speaks of the fulfilment of a sacred trust; and that trust is to preach the doctrine received, and to hand it on as a sacred trust to other men.

The subject is well illustrated by comparing the conduct of Moses with that of St. Paul, both on this and on other occasions. When the Jewish lawgiver was drawing near his death, 'he

gathered unto him all the ancients and doctors,' and read out to them a solemn canticle; but as 'he knew that after his death they would do wickedly, and would quickly turn aside from the way he had commanded them,' he made another provision. He 'wrote the words of the law in a volume, and finished it; and he commanded the Levites. . . . Take this book, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a testimony against thee' (Deut. xxxi. 24, 29).

When St. Paul deems his end drawing near, he, too, 'calls together the ancients of the Church,' and gives them a last and touching exhortation (Acts xx.) He also foresees future scandals and rebellions. 'I know that after my departure ravening wolves will enter in among you, not sparing the flock. And of your own selves shall arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.' But he does not make the same provision as Moses had done. He writes down no statement or summary of the law of Jesus Christ. He delivers to them no volume to remain as a memorial against them. Against the dangers that threaten he refers them to his oral teaching: 'I have not spared to declare unto you all the counsel of God.' He solemnly charges them 'Take heed to yourselves and to the whole flock wherein the Holy Ghost hath placed you bishops, to rule the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own Blood;' and, lastly, he 'commends them to God and to the word of His grace, who is able to build up.'

This solemn mention of the Holy Ghost explains the conduct of the Apostle. There is a tone of hopelessness in the address of Moses that is not in that of St. Paul. Both, indeed, foresee and foretell evil days. But whereas Moses can only look back to the threats and terrors of Sinai, St. Paul remembers how the prophecy of Jeremy was fulfilled in the descent of the Holy Ghost on Pentecost, and is strengthened and consoled by the great promise of Jesus Christ: 'I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you

for ever, the Spirit of Truth whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, nor knoweth Him; but you shall know Him, because He shall abide with you and be in you' (John xiv. 16, 17). Therefore, though St. Paul knows that each of those whom he addresses is fallible and may prove unfaithful, though he fears for individual souls, he fears not for the Truth, nor for the Church. It is purchased by the Blood of God, and ruled by the Holy Ghost. 'It is founded on a Rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'

Dr. Whately, in a sermon on the above passage of the Acts of the Apostles, observes that St. Paul, in his previsions and provisions for the future, says nothing of Popes or of Councils. The remark is a foolish one, and might be retorted on himself by the equally correct but equally foolish remark that neither does the Apostle say anything of the Bible. The truth is, that St. Paul relied neither on Book nor on Tradition, considered as mere human means of preserving truth. His trust was in the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost, the interior Teacher, makes use of many external means, of which inspired Scripture is one, and all the rest are called Tradition. It was the Holy Ghost who had appointed the Bishops assembled at Ephesus to rule the Church (Acts xx. 28). It was, therefore, to Him that Paul commended them, that He might make them faithful guardians of the oral lessons they had received.

So also, in writing to St. Timothy, he reminded him that the 'good thing' had been committed to his trust by the Holy Ghost (2 Tim. i. 14), and exhorted him, aided by that divine Assistant and Protector, to teach the doctrine he had learnt, to use the inspired Scriptures which he possessed, and to hand down the whole deposit to the future teachers of the Church. As to the epistle in which he conveys this advice, he assigns to it a temporary purpose: 'These things I write to thee, hoping that I shall come to thee shortly; but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God, the

pillar and ground of the truth' (1 Tim. iii. 14, 15). Let me not be misunderstood. I do not insinuate that the Epistle to St. Timothy was designed by the Holy Ghost, who inspired it, to serve only the temporary purpose of the personal instruction of St. Timothy, for which St. Paul declares that he wrote it; nor do I intend to deny—though no proof to this effect can be brought from Scripture—that St. Paul himself was aware of the future and perpetual use of his epistle. I cannot doubt that St. Paul intended both St. Timothy and St. Timothy's successors, as he did the Thessalonians, to 'stand fast, and hold the traditions which they had received, whether by word or by epistle.' The Apostle also had declared that all Scripture, which is inspired, is useful to the Christian minister, the appointed guardian of the 'deposit' and the teacher of the flock, for the fulfilment of his various duties. Of course, therefore, as time went on, the faithful successors of St. Timothy would make the same use of the New Testament, or of those portions of it which they possessed, that St. Timothy had made of the Old. But how utterly different is this from the substitution of Scripture for Tradition, and of the private reader for the public and authoritative teacher!

That the Holy Ghost and the Apostles intended that Scripture should be of great and inestimable service to the Church is, then, a legitimate conclusion from facts; but that Scripture should ever depose Tradition or supersede the living teacher is contrary to its own express declarations. The Church is still the pillar and ground of the truth; but Tradition forms the basis of this pillar no less than Scripture. It is hard to see how an unprejudiced man, whose mind is not already possessed by the axiom, 'The Bible alone is the religion of Protestants,' could, from the words addressed by St. Paul to Timothy, come to the conclusion that, in the course of a century or two, the Church of the *living* God would grow sick and die, the pillar and ground of the truth would totter and fall. Yet what else is the Protestant theory?

When Jesus Christ stood before Pontius Pilate, and was interrogated as to His Kingship, He replied: 'For this was I born, and for this came I into the world, that I should give testimony to the truth' (John xviii. 37). The kingdom, then, of Jesus Christ is one of which truth is the constitution, truth the wealth, and the diffusion of truth the very purpose of its existence. The kingdom of Jesus Christ, or the Church of the living God, as St. Paul calls it, is the very 'pillar and ground of the truth.' Truth can no more fail from the Church than Jesus Christ can have been born in vain. The preservation of this truth whole and undefiled is the perpetual work of the Holy Ghost. In this work the Apostles and their successors are His co-operators. In fulfilling their trust they are not left to their own discretion. The same mode was doubtless prescribed to others as to St. Timothy and to the Bishops at Ephesus. What they had received orally and personally before many witnesses from the Apostles, they committed orally and personally to faithful men. Together with copies of Apostolic writings they handed down Apostolic doctrine, Apostolic discipline, Apostolic ritual, Apostolic succession. Those faithful men were commanded to do the same to another generation of faithful men after them. When was this to cease? Was it, indeed, ever to cease? No hint of such a thing is given by the Apostle. It was a trust for which they were to render an account to God. Would they have been faithful men, had they considered that their trust had lapsed, without an express declaration of the will of God?

No. If that charge of St. Paul was given by divine authority, then it is certain that had those men who received the deposit in direct succession from the Apostles—*quasi per manus*—relinquished that deposit, no matter when—at the end of the first century, when the Canon was completed; in the fourth century, when it was generally promulgated; in the fifteenth, when printing was invented; in the sixteenth, when their authority was challenged; in the nineteenth, when Bible

Societies claimed to do their work—had they at any period, without a new revelation of God's will, declared that their authoritative guardianship of the faith and worship, discipline and government, of the Church had now had its time, they would have sinned against the Holy Ghost, who had committed to them the deposit, and set them to rule the Church, and would have betrayed the Blood of Jesus Christ, with which the Church was purchased.

Two difficulties occur which deserve some answer.

1. First, then, it may be said that there is no test whereby to distinguish between divine institutions and human additions and corruptions. Thus it is the popular notion among Protestants that under the name of Tradition a door is opened for every kind of innovation. Besides this, even suppose that we could succeed in tracing back a doctrine or a practice or a ceremony to the very earliest ages of the Church, what guarantee do we possess of its Apostolicity? Might it not be a primitive corruption, or at best a merely human element introduced amidst what is divine? This has led some Protestants, while admitting Tradition as an *initial* source of the knowledge of Revelation, to deny its authority, unless it be confirmed by clear proofs from Scripture. They would assign to it somewhat of the position that theologians hold towards the Bishops assembled in Council. It prepares the matter on which Scripture alone can pass judgment.

This is not and cannot be the Catholic view. Divine Tradition is the word of God no less than Scripture. The written and unwritten Word may support and explain each other, but they have equal authority.

We reply, then, to the difficulties proposed, that we have the very same means of sifting Traditions and verifying those that are authentic, and assigning their proper character—as divine or Apostolico-divine, or merely Apostolic, or ecclesiastical—that we have of sifting early Christian writings, and discerning between those that are inspired, those that are good though

human, and those that are bad. The apocryphal gospels and epistles, that abounded in early ages of the Christian Church, do not disprove the authentic writings of the Apostles. Neither do apocryphal Traditions throw discredit or doubt on those Traditions that are authentic and divine.

The Canon of Scripture was drawn up and Traditions verified by the same means, by the same authority, and with the same certainty. There are doubtless, at the present day, difficulties attending the historical evidences of both. The oral testimony of Apostolic men died with them. The living Tradition of Apostolic Churches, though it survives in its results, can no longer be tested in itself. Many important historical documents have perished. Neither individuals nor the Churches have the materials at hand on which the Churches of the third or fourth centuries passed judgment. That judgment can never be revised. We must accept it, whether as to our Canon of Scripture or as to Traditions, as final and divine, or we must lapse into hopeless scepticism. There are, for instance, no greater historical difficulties about the seven Sacraments than about the fourteen Epistles of St. Paul. Those who decline to admit the Church's infallibility,* or in other words the fulfilment of God's promises to her, will seek in vain for literary or scientific certainty. They will become the sport of caprice or of fashion; and we shall have, on the one hand, Luther proclaiming the Epistle of St. James to be an 'Epistle of Straw,' and on the other the Church of England calling the Sacrament of Extreme Unction 'a corrupt following of the Apostles.'

2. A second difficulty might be thus stated: Does not the Catholic view of Tradition make the New Testament an incomplete work, or can any plan be assigned according to which God has drawn the limits between Scripture and Tradition?

* Catholics believe our Lord bestowed the privilege of infallibility on His Church when, shortly before His death, He said: "I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, *that He may abide with you for ever.* . . . But when He, *the Spirit of Truth*, shall come, *He will teach you all truth* (John xiv. 16; xvi. 13). A promise to guard the Church from error could not have been expressed in clearer language.

Before replying directly to this question, I may observe that the rejection of Tradition would not free Protestants from difficulty. The completeness of Scripture could only be a conjecture, an assumption, or a trust. Even if all Apostolic writings had survived, Protestants could have no certainty that the whole Christian Revelation had been embodied in them. But it is admitted that Apostolic writings have perished.* We do not know what they contained. Catholics have just as much right to conjecture (if they so please), that a lost Epistle contained details regarding the *Sacrifice* of the Eucharist, or the *Sacrament* of Holy Orders, identical with the testimony of primitive Tradition, as Protestants have to contend that the lost Epistles would have added nothing to those we possess. Let any one consider what would be the effect, on those who look to Scripture only, of the absence of one or other book of our present Canon. If what we now call the First Epistle to the Corinthians had perished, instead of that which was really the first written, some one might have told us that there is not a title of evidence in any Apostolic Epistle that the Apostles practised, or even knew, of such an ordinance as 'the Lord's Supper' or Communion; † and we should have had a great negative argument framed against the Eucharist, similar to that we hear so much of against the devotion to the Blessed Virgin. It would have been said: could St. Paul be in the habit of celebrating the Eucharist, and yet never say one word about it in any one of his Epistles? This cannot now be said, because by means of the First Epistle to the Corinthians we have his own testimony to the fact. Yet—except on the assumption of an overruling Providence of God compelling St. Paul to record every part of his faith and practice *at least once*—what more value is there in a negative argument derived from the silence of fourteen Epistles than in one derived from the silence of

* In his *first* Epistle to the Corinthians St. Paul alludes to a previous one (1 Cor. v. 9).

† Many Protestants refuse to see any allusion to the Eucharist in Heb. xiii. 10.

thirteen? Or, on the other hand, if the fourteenth, being preserved, throws quite a new light on the other thirteen, who can tell but that the fifteenth, which is lost, would, if preserved, have thrown a new light on the present fourteen? We do not say that this would have been so, for we know absolutely nothing as to the contents of the lost Epistles; but to my mind, at least, there is no improbability in supposing that they would have *completed* the knowledge which we derive from Scripture on some points of doctrine, discipline, or ritual, just as it is now completed by the possession of Tradition.

Whatever may be thought of this, the completeness of the New Testament as a record of Revelation is a mere assumption Catholics deny it; and if they are asked for what reason, or on what plan God gave Tradition as a complement to Scripture, or Scripture as a complement to Tradition, we would answer as follows:

In many cases we must be satisfied with knowing the fact of God's Providence, without being able to attain to its intrinsic reason; and this appears to be partly the case as regards the Canon of the New Testament. It is the Catholic belief that God inspired the sacred writers both as to what they say and as to what they omit; and there are many cases when we can discover deep and beautiful wisdom in an omission. But there are many cases when we shall be at a loss to know why great prominence is given to certain things and others are passed over.

However, we think that a careful examination of the structure of the historical books will reveal to us the method which directed the historians in their statements and omissions. They seem to have entered into detail with regard to those things that were transitory, and to have passed lightly over those things that were to be permanent, and that would therefore speak for themselves. The birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ were transitory actions; they were to take place once only. They were ever to be remembered, but never to

be repeated. Now, though these great facts are commemorated in unwritten Tradition, and bound up with the Ritual of the Church, yet the circumstances which attended them were such as could scarcely have been transmitted safely and in detail without writing. As God wished these circumstances to be remembered, He inspired the Evangelists to enter into the fullest detail in relating them.

So also with regard to the words of Jesus Christ. Many besides those now known may have been in the mouths of the first Christians, liked that which St. Paul quoted to the elders at Ephesus ; but for ages the memory has perished of all but such as are recorded in the Gospels. We conclude that God inspired the Evangelists to record all such of the words of His Divine Son as it was pleasing to Him to communicate to future ages.

But when we turn to the second class of things, those that are in their own nature permanent, we find a different plan pursued. 'The things of the kingdom of God' are referred to (Acts i. 3), but not related in detail. The government and hierarchy of the Church, the Church's worship, her sacraments and rites, were to be visible and imperishable institutions. They would bear witness to themselves—tell their own tale. They would thus be familiar and well known to all those for whom the historians wrote. It was natural, therefore, to omit these things, or merely to mention their first origin, or to refer to them by an allusion.

Again, amongst familiar things were the great doctrines of the faith. These are everywhere supposed, seldom spoken of explicitly. Perhaps of all matters connected with Scripture this is the most important to bear in mind.

Let us take, for an example, the method of writing used by St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. When he gives an abridgment of an Apostle's discourse in a Jewish synagogue, or in a heathen market-place, he merely details the process by which the Apostles insinuated themselves into their hearers'

minds. As this process would vary according to circumstances, it would not be known to St. Luke's readers. They would remember how the Apostles succeeded with themselves; they would be glad to know how they had succeeded with others. This, therefore, would be exactly the kind of information St. Luke would be likely to give. But when once the Apostles had found docile hearers, their instruction would be of the same tenor in every place. St. Luke's readers had personal experience of that instruction: there was no necessity to repeat it to them. It would have been wearisome to do so. Locke has noticed that when St. Paul preached to the Jews or to proselytes of the Jews, he said nothing to them of the believing in one true God, Maker of heaven and earth; which he did when preaching to heathens; and the reason he assigns for this difference is a good one: 'It was needless,' he says, 'to press this truth about God to those who believed and professed it already.' Now, a precisely similar account may be given of St. Luke's manner of abridging the Apostle's sermons. As St. Paul thought it unnecessary to teach the unity of God to Jews who knew it already, so St. Luke thought it needless to tell Christians that the Apostle taught his converts the Trinity of Persons; because his Christian readers knew the Apostle's doctrine already. He says it equivalently when he relates that the converts were baptised; for he is writing to Christian converts, who had themselves been baptised 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' It would have been almost an impertinence in St. Luke, had he wearied his readers with the first elements of Christianity, and with repetition of the facts of their daily experience.

If Christians in those days had been, like Protestants now, divided into a multitude of sects—one affirming, the other denying, Jesus Christ to be God; one adoring, the other rejecting, a Trinity of Persons; one believing Baptism to be an efficacious sacrament, the other regarding it as a mere figure; one believing in and worshipping the Real Presence, the other

calling such worship idolatrous—if such had been the condition of those first Christians, then St. Luke would most probably have adopted a very different method in his narrative. He would have passed rapidly over the Apostle's adventures, and dwelt little on his preliminary preaching, while he would have enlarged on the precise meaning given to the articles of faith controverted among his readers.

But St. Luke was writing to men who, like Catholics of the present day, were united in faith. To his readers the facts and the truths of Christianity were objective, undisputed realities, clearly and universally admitted. He therefore adopts exactly the style that Catholics make use of under similar circumstances. If two converts to the Catholic faith compare notes regarding their conversion, they will dilate on the points in which they differed, on the events or the train of reflections that led them respectively to seek admission into the Church; but they will never waste time in asking each other about the nature of the creed they were taught, and which they professed, or the form of their reception. They know they were both taught the same creed, and both admitted by the same rites.

If a missionary writes home to Catholics, he dwells on his adventures, and the arguments by which he convinces the ignorant savage or the learned bonze; he does not tire his readers by repeating the Apostle's Creed on the occasion of each conversion that he narrates. You might read through a volume of the Annals of the Propagation of the Faith without meeting a single passage in which the missionary informs his fellow-Catholics at home that he believes in seven sacraments, and teaches his converts to believe the same. It may crop up incidentally, but it will be only incidentally; and the last book, perhaps, from which a reasonable man would think of gathering a full and precise notion of the Catholic creed and discipline, would be those very historical letters that everywhere presupposes them.

Some most important consequences follow from this struc-

ture of Holy Scripture both as to Catholic and Protestant theology.

a. Though Catholics contend that all or nearly all their doctrines and practices are to be found in the Bible, either explicitly or in allusion, in germ or in principle, yet they have never denied that much that is plain in Councils is obscure in Scripture, nor have they affirmed that the relative importance of certain doctrines or practices in the Catholic Church always corresponds to their relative prominence, or to the space they occupy in the New Testament.

This admission is no source of embarrassment to an instructed Catholic, nor of triumph to an unprejudiced Protestant. There is nothing whatever to perplex a Catholic in the fact that nowhere in the New Testament is it explicitly stated that there are Three Persons in God, distinct, yet of one nature; or that the Son of God is God the Son, or that Confirmation is a sacrament, or that the sacrament of Penance is the only plank after making shipwreck of baptismal innocence, and the rest.

We feel no more embarrassed at such omissions than we should be if we found it nowhere explicitly stated in a gardener's life and journals that the sun rises and sets, that there are four seasons in the year, that rain is necessary to the fertility of the soil, with similar truisms. One would scarcely expect such well-known facts to be set down, even in a formal treatise on gardening; though they doubtless would be so stated were any person found to deny them. But in the life or correspondence of a gardener, we should expect to find them everywhere taken for granted and alluded to as too familiar to writer and to reader to require more distinct mention. Now, neither the Gospels nor the Acts of the Apostles nor the Epistles are formal treatises on the Christian faith and discipline. Therefore Catholics do not look in them for formal statements of elementary truths. We take, not from them, but to them, our belief in the Blessed Trinity, and it unlocks many a passage; we take to them our belief in the Divinity of Jesus Christ, and

it makes everything plain ; we take to them our belief in the Sacraments, and we find just those indications that we should expect to find under the circumstances in which they were written.

b. And next as regards Protestant theology. Were it true that the Bible was intended by God to be the sole source of knowledge to mankind regarding the Christian religion, then not only would all necessary doctrines and practices of that religion find explicit statement there, but they would hold the relative prominence that they do in the mind of God, and ought to do in reality. But will Protestants maintain that this is the case? Will those who believe in the Divinity of the Holy Ghost, and in the duty of offering Him worship, maintain that these doctrines are taught as formally in the Bible as in their own pulpits? Or does the observance of the Sabbath stand out in that relief in the New Testament which it obtains in the doctrine and discipline of most Protestants? Protestants no doubt are continually discovering these inconsistencies, and discarding doctrines and practices of their forefathers on the plea of greater conformity to the Bible. But if what has been said of the structure of the New Testament is true, then this very attempt to build on it alone may only lead to wider departure from real and primitive Christianity. For, when a creed or rule of life is drawn exclusively from a document in which the essential parts of the system are omitted or mentioned only in allusion, while minor details occupy an ample space, there is every likelihood that the minor points will get an undue importance, while the essential things will be put in the background, or be neglected altogether.

St. Paul, for example, complains to the Hebrews that they are still children requiring to be fed with milk, that is, to have the rudiments of Christian faith and morals repeated to them. He thinks the oral instruction they have received ought to have done this. He does not want to occupy himself with it again. In a word, he wants to write an epistle to men, not

a catechism for children. He determines to do so; 'Wherefore,' he says, 'leaving the word of the beginning of Christ' (as Catholics would say—'What every Christian ought to know'), 'let us go on to things more perfect, not laying again the foundation.' He does not want to repeat in his Epistle the foundation, or fundamental truths of Christianity. He merely indicates what that foundation is: 'Not laying again the foundation of penance from dead works, and of faith towards God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of imposition of hands, and of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment' (Heb. vi. 1, 2). He here places among the very foundations of Christianity, those elementary truths and facts that ought to be familiar to every disciple of Christ by the living and traditional teaching he has received, *and which ought therefore to find no place in his Epistles.*

Now is it not evident that if men, forgetting this structure of the Epistles, go to them as to a catechism for an exposition of the whole Christian system, or look in them for the fundamental things, they will expose themselves to the most serious mistakes? Allusions will certainly be misunderstood; and even when the meaning of what is clear is attained, it will be perverted by the unnatural position that is assigned to it.

This will help us to understand the words of St. Peter. He says that in St. Paul's Epistles are certain things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and the unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. And he adds immediately the following warning: 'You, therefore brethren, knowing these things before, take heed, lest being led aside by the error of the unwise, you fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Pet. iii. 16, 18). The existence of the obscurities here alluded to proves them to be designed by God. We must believe that God inspired St. Paul to write thus obscurely. But the fact of the danger to which these obscurities expose the unlearned and unstable

ought to convince any one that God has provided a remedy against the danger. The exhortation of St. Peter shows what this remedy is. He tells his disciples not to let the interpretation of difficult passages of Scripture which may either occur to themselves, or be suggested by others, make them 'fall from their steadfastness,' *i.e.*, abandon their steadfast adherence to the doctrine and discipline of Christ, which they have received orally from their teachers. If they hold fast to Tradition they may 'grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ,' by reading the Scriptures. If they have not Tradition, Scripture will only make still broader for them the road that leads to 'destruction.' To those who are steadfast to the Tradition they have received, the very difficulties of Scripture will be a powerful help to grow in grace. They will exercise their patience, excite their attention, and provoke a most fruitful labour in their solution. But of course these are exercises not for the unlearned and unstable, but for those who are settled in the faith.

T. E. BRIDGETT, C.S.S.R.
